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THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION RECONSIDERED¹

WHEN the representatives of George V recently paid homage to the tomb of the great disloyalist and rebel of a former century, George Washington, the minds of many Americans reverted, with a sense of bewilderment, to the times when the third George was guiding the destinies of the British people. It required the shock of American entrance into the Great War to cause Americans as a people to seek a new orientation for the revolutionary struggle and to view the conflict from a standpoint of scientific detachment. In the first years of the republic the tendency of popular histories and text-books was to dwell almost exclusively upon the spectacular developments of the struggle and to dramatize the heroism of the patriots. In the next period, extending perhaps to the decade of the Civil War, the endeavor of the writers was to exploit the American Revolution for the purpose of sharpening the keen edge of popular antipathy for Great Britain. Popular accounts of the Revolution took on a new color with the great economic transformation following the Civil War and the rise of modern capitalism. Without neglecting the capricious tyrannies that were still represented as marking the conduct of the British government there was a tendency to soften or omit those incidents which would have caused the American Revolution to resemble other popular uprisings against special privilege in government. In 1902 one writer, bored to protest by the current accounts, shrewdly charged the writers of history with trying "to describe a revolution in which all scholarly, refined, and conservative persons might have unhesitatingly taken part;" But such revolutions, he added, "have never been known to happen."²

¹ A paper prepared for presentation at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Cleveland, December 27, 1918.

² Fisher, S. G., *The True History of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1902), p. 9.

But already a reaction was setting in against the exploitation of the American Revolution for nationalistic or propagandist purposes. At the same time that publicists were questioning the foundations and practices of our modern economic system, a band of devoted research students, working independently of each other in large part, were employing the ruthless methods of modern scholarship in an effort to make possible a re-appraisal of the great conflict. Such scholars as Andrews, Beer, Becker, Chamberlain, Cross, Alvord, Fisher, Lincoln and Moses Coit Tyler rediscovered the Revolution through the examination of a great mass of source material; and within human limitations they sought to assess the evidence thus disclosed without regard to previously accepted opinions. It is not too much to say that they and their co-laborers have ushered in a new era in our understanding of the origins of the American Revolution.

Most of our text-books and popular treatises, however, have continued to perpetuate the obscurantism of the earlier time,¹ and the students in our graduate schools seem to have been the only persons to be admitted within the inner portals where is to be found the shrine of Truth. The coming age promises to be an era in which an international comity will be attained that has never before been approached in the history of the world. This imposes upon those writers who interpret history for the masses the grave responsibility of being as scrupulously fair to other nations as to the United States in dealing with the events of American history; and it is a fact not to be denied that no episode requires re-examination more than the American Revolution. Furthermore, we are living in an epoch of popular revolutions; and every day's reading convinces one that, if it was ever proper to regard the American Revolution as a phenomenon operating in accordance with laws of its own and unlike popular uprisings generally, that time has receded into the dim past.

¹ Altschul, Charles, *The American Revolution in Our School Text-Books: An Attempt to Trace the Influence of Early School Education on the Feeling towards England in the United States* (New York, 1917), is of interest in this connection.

The term "American Revolution" is itself not without difficulties and its use has led to misconception and confusion. In letter after letter John Adams tried to teach a headstrong generation some degree of exactness in the use of an expression whose meaning they had knowledge of only by report. "A history of the first war of the United States is a very different thing from a history of the American Revolution," he wrote in 1815. ". . . The revolution was in the minds of the people, and in the union of the colonies, both of which were accomplished before hostilities commenced. This revolution and union were gradually forming from the year 1760 to 1776." And to another correspondent he wrote: "But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people."¹

This distinction is not only valid in point of fact but it offers a helpful avenue of approach for a consideration of the facts of the nation's birth. If the period from 1760 to 1776 is not viewed merely as the prelude to the American Revolution, the military struggle may frankly be regarded for what it actually was, namely a war for independence, an armed attempt to impose the views of the revolutionists upon the British government and a large section of the colonial population at whatever cost to freedom of opinion or the sanctity of life and property. The major emphasis is thus placed upon the clashing of economic interests and the interplay of mutual prejudices, opposing ideals and personal antagonisms—whether in England or America—which made inevitable in 1776 what was unthinkable in 1760.

Without considering here the remote and latent causes of the revolt, a discussion of the American Revolution may profitably begin with the effort of the British government to reorganize the British empire after the Peace of Paris of 1763. Of this empire the thirteen colonies along the Atlantic seaboard

¹ For these and other similar views, see Adams, J., *Works* (Boston, 1850-1856), vol. v, p. 492; vol. x, pp. 180, 182, 197, 282-283.

had, by virtue of the recent peace, become but a small part. British statesmen felt the imperative need of correcting the slothful and unsystematic methods of colonial management by which some of the older colonies had been granted more liberal government than that enjoyed by organized territories of the United States today, and under which all the continental American colonies had become neglectful or defiant of ordinary imperial obligations. There was a need that all the outlying British possessions should be more closely integrated for purposes of administration and that the far-flung empire should be defended against the ambitions of England's traditional enemies, France and Spain, as well as against the restlessness of the alien subject populations. The problem which confronted the British government was much more difficult than the questions of colonial organization with which the American government has wrestled since 1898; but the American adventure in imperialism, involving, as it did, the question of whether the constitution followed the flag, should enable Americans of the present generation to view with sympathy the British experiment of the eighteenth century.

The king's ministers glimpsed too narrowly the task before them. What they regarded as an exercise in the mechanics of legislation was really an innovation in imperial relations that touched the dynamic currents of colonial opinion and colonial economic interest at many vital points. Moreover their attempt was being made at a time when the colonies were, for the first time in their history, relieved of their most urgent need of British protection by the removal of the French menace from their frontiers. Under the earlier imperial policy of "salutary neglect" the colonies had grown in wealth and political capacity, so that by the middle of the eighteenth century they had become accustomed to conduct themselves toward England as substantially equal commonwealths in a federation. For them the new imperial policy involved additional tax burdens, loss of trading profits and limitations of self-government, liberties that were none the less precious because derived from an unwritten and unsanctioned constitution. Fundamentally, the great problem of the decade following the peace of 1763 was the

problem of the reconciliation of centralized imperial control with colonial home rule. This, unfortunately, was never clearly perceived by the dominant element on either side, the issue being obscured by a blind officialism on the one hand and by an unilluminated particularism on the other.

Perhaps the problem was incapable of solution; but we can see now that the best opportunity for a satisfactory outcome lay in the application to the situation of an enlightened statecraft on the part of Great Britain. To this the posture of political affairs in the country was not well adapted. George III, who had ascended the throne in 1760, was already devoting every political and financial resource in his power to the task of converting the British government from an aristocracy of great Whig families into a personal autocracy. His parliament and ministers did not seek to reflect the aspirations of the British public and therefore lacked a potent incentive for the formulation of a conciliatory program of colonial subordination. The minority in parliament represented by Pitt and Burke readily identified the struggle of the colonists to preserve home rule with their own struggle in England against autocratic rule. Pitt was thinking primarily of Englishmen at home when he exclaimed on the occasion of the Stamp Act commotions: "I rejoice that America has resisted." If his counsels had been followed by the government, it is entirely possible that the colonial revolt might have been forestalled by some plan of imperial federation.

With this brief view of affairs in Great Britain it is now possible to consider the situation in America. Conditions there were both simpler and more complex than the traditional accounts represent. In place of thirteen units of population thinking alike on most public questions, there were in fact two or possibly three major groupings of population, differentiated by physiographical conditions, economic interests and political ideals. The communities on the coastal plain from New Hampshire to Pennsylvania constituted one of these divisions; the settlements of the tidewater regions from Maryland to Georgia formed another; and the third, less clearly outlined geographically, consisted of the western sections of many of the

provinces. These three divisions represented modes of living and attitudes of mind much more fundamental than those indicated by arbitrary political boundaries.

The first area may conveniently be called the commercial section because the dominant economic interest of the people was the carrying trade and shipbuilding. Here great mercantile families had grown up, who had gained their wealth through smuggling with the West Indies or else through legitimate trading enterprises that embraced the entire world. The merchants were keenly alive to the golden benefits which membership in the British empire had always yielded; and like the business interests of any generation or clime, they might be expected to combat any effort to tamper with the source of their profits. For the merchants the unfolding of the new imperial program involved a very serious interference with their customary trading operations; and during the decade from 1764 to 1774 their constant aim was to effect a restoration of the commercial conditions of 1763. As a class they entertained neither earlier nor later the idea of independence, for withdrawal from the British empire meant for them the loss of vital business advantages without corresponding benefits in a world organized on a basis of imperial trading systems. They strove to obtain the most favorable terms possible within the empire but not to leave it. Indeed they viewed with no small concern the growth of republican feeling and leveling sentiment which the controversy occasioned.

The great ports of the north—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Newport—bore eloquent testimony to the prosperity of the mercantile class; and on the continuance of this prosperity depended the livelihood of the mechanics and petty shopkeepers of the towns and, to a lesser degree, the well-being of the farmers whose cereals and meats were exported to the West Indies. This proletarian element was not inclined by temperament to that self-restraint in movements of popular protest which was ever the *arrière pensée* of the merchant class; and being for the most part unenfranchised, they expressed their sentiments most naturally through boisterous mass meetings and mob demonstrations.

In the southern coastal area colonial capital was invested almost exclusively in plantation production; and commerce was carried on chiefly by British mercantile houses and their American agents, the factors. The only town in the plantation provinces that could compare with the teeming ports of the north was Charleston; and political life was focused in the periodical meetings of the great landed proprietors in the assemblies. Under the wasteful system of marketing, which the apparent plenty of plantation life made possible, the planters found themselves treading a morass of indebtedness to British merchants from which it seemed that nothing less than virtual repudiation could extricate them. In the last twenty-five years of colonial dependence the assemblies passed a succession of lax bankruptcy acts and other legislation prejudicial to non-resident creditors; but these laws nearly always ran afoul the royal veto. This fact, together with the sturdy sense of self-determination which the peculiar social system fostered, made the plantation provinces ready to resent any new exercise of parliamentary authority over the colonies, such as the new imperial policy involved. Georgia, as the youngest colony, not yet self-sustaining, and dependent on the home government for protection against a serious Indian menace, was less a part of this picture than the other provinces of the group.

On the western fringe of the coastal communities lay an irregular belt of back-country settlements whose economy and modes of thought were almost as distinctive as those of the two tidewater regions. Certainly the western sections of many of the provinces had grievances in common and resembled each other more than they did the older sections with which they were associated by provincial boundaries. These pioneer settlements extended north and south, up and down the valleys between the fall line of the rivers and mountains, from New England to Georgia. Outside of New England the majority of the settlers were of non-English strains, mostly German and Scotch-Irish; but throughout the long frontier the people cultivated small isolated farms and entertained democratic ideas commensurate with the equalitarian conditions to which their manner of living accustomed them. In many of the provinces

they had long been discriminated against by the older settlements in the matter of representation in the assemblies, the administration of justice and the incidence of taxation; and they were thus familiar, of their own experience, with all the arguments which the Revolution was to make popular against non-representative government and unjust taxation. Being self-sustaining communities economically, their zeal for popular rights was in no wise alloyed by the embarrassment of their pocketbooks. Although out of harmony with the popular leaders of the seaboard in both the commercial and plantation provinces on many matters of intracolony policy, they could join forces with them against the new imperial policy; and they brought to the controversy a moral conviction and bold philosophy which gave great impetus to the agitation for independence.¹

The history of the American Revolution is the story of the reaction of these three sections to the successive acts of the British government and of their interaction upon each other. The merchants of the commercial colonies were the most seriously affected by the new imperial policy and at the outset assumed the leadership of the colonial movement of protest. They were closely seconded by the planters of the south as soon as enough time had elapsed to make clear to the latter the implications of the issue of home rule for which the merchants stood. The democratic farmers of the interior, more or less out of contact with the political currents of the seaboard, were slower to take part; and it is largely true that their measure of participation varied inversely according to the degree of their isolation. Patrick Henry and his fellow burgesses from the western counties of Virginia began to undermine the conserv-

¹ In Georgia, however, the frontier settlers were pro-British in their sympathies because of their dependence on the home government for protection against the ever-present menace of the Creeks. Twenty-five years ago Professor J. S. Bassett, in a discriminating study, showed why the people of the interior counties of North Carolina became loyalists when the issue of independence was raised. Had the friction between the interior democracies and coastal minorities developed to the point of armed rebellion in other provinces prior to 1776, the back-country folk might everywhere have thrown their weight on the side of the British government and thus have defeated the Revolution.

atism of the tidewater statesmen as early as 1765, but the Germans and Scotch-Irish of Pennsylvania did not make their influence fully felt until the critical days of 1774-1775.

The new British policy of imperial control assumed its first form under George Grenville (1764-1765). The numerous regulations of trade, which need not be analyzed here, injured fair traders and smuggling merchants alike and threatened bankruptcy to the great mercantile houses of Boston, New York and Philadelphia. The prohibition of colonial legal tender added to their woes and indeed made the hard-pressed planters of the south sharers in the general distress. The Stamp Act, with its far-reaching taxes burdensome alike to merchant and farmer, sealed the union of commercial and plantation provinces at the same time that it afforded an opportunity for placing the colonial argument on constitutional grounds; and because of the character of the taxation, it rallied to the colonial position the powerful support of the lawyers and newspaper proprietors. The plan of the British to garrison their new acquisitions in America and to station a few detachments of troops in the older colonies was, in the feverish state of the public mind, envisaged as a brazen attempt to intimidate the colonists into submission. The merchants of some of the ports, intent on restoring the conditions of their former prosperity, adopted resolutions of non-importation; and little recking the future, they aroused the populace to a sense of British injustice, even to the extent of countenancing and instigating mob excesses and the destruction of property.

In the end parliament resolved upon the passage of certain remedial laws (1766), an outcome which, from the standpoint of the more radical colonists, can be regarded as little more than a compromise. The Stamp Act was indeed repealed and important alterations were made in the trade regulations; but the Currency Act, the regulations against smuggling and the provisions for a standing army remained unchanged. In addition the Declaratory Act was passed; and the new molasses duty was an unvarnished application of the principle of "taxation without representation" announced in the Declaratory Act. The rejoicing of the colonists can be explained only on

the ground that the merchants of the north dominated colonial opinion; and like practical men of affairs, they were contemptuous, if not fearful, of disputes upon questions of abstract right.

The passage of the Townshend Acts in 1767 was the second attempt of parliament to reconstruct the empire in the spirit of the Grenville experiment. Again the merchants of the commercial colonies perceived themselves as the class whose interests were chiefly imperiled; but sobered by the mob outrages of Stamp Act days, they resolved to guide the course of American opposition in orderly and peaceful channels. They, therefore, began an active agitation for corrective legislation through merchants' petitions and legislative memorials to parliament; and after much questioning of each others' sincerity they succeeded in developing an elaborate system of commercial boycott, which united the commercial colonies in an effort to secure the repeal of the objectionable laws. After a year or so this movement in a much modified form spread to the plantation provinces, where, under the leadership of Washington and other planters, it was employed as a means of preventing the landed aristocracy from falling more deeply into the toils of their British creditors.

Meantime the merchants began to see that in organizing their communities for peaceful resistance to Great Britain they were unavoidably releasing disruptive forces which, like Frankenstein, they were finding it impossible to control. The failure of non-importation to effect swift redress compelled the merchant bodies, as the months passed, to depend more and more upon the tumultuous methods of the proletariat in order to keep wavering merchants true to the cause. Increasing friction between smuggling merchants and customs officers also produced outbreaks of mob violence in many provinces, and led by a broad, smooth road to such distressing affairs as the Boston "Massacre" on the one hand and to the destruction of the revenue cutter *Gaspee* on the other. As the political agitators and turbulent elements gained the upper hand, the contest began to assume more clearly the form of a crusade for constitutional and natural rights; and when word arrived in May, 1770, that parliament had repealed all the Townshend duties except

the trifling tax on tea, the merchants found it difficult to reassert their earlier control and to stop a movement that had lost all significance for hard-headed men of business. The merchants of New York, under the leadership of their newly formed Chamber of Commerce, were the first who were able to wrench loose from their enforced alliance with the radicals; and the cancellation of their boycott resolutions was soon followed by similar action in the ports of Philadelphia and Boston. The plantation provinces were coolly left in the lurch notwithstanding that parliament had not receded from its position of arbitrary taxation, and the movement there soon died of inanition.

The two or three years that followed the partial repeal of the Townshend duties were, for the most part, years of material prosperity and political calm. The merchants had grown to look askance at a doctrine of home rule which left it uncertain who was to rule at home. As a class they eagerly agreed with the merchant-politician Thomas Cushing that "high points about the supreme authority of Parliament" should best "fall asleep."¹ And so—John Hancock as well as Isaac Low—they deserted politics for business, even to the extent of importing dutied tea which people imbibed everywhere except at Philadelphia and New York, where local conditions made it possible for merchants to offer the cheaper Dutch tea to consumers. The sun of the radicals had suffered an eclipse; and quietly biding their time, they began to apply to their own following the lessons of organization that they had learned from the "mercantile dons." In the commercial colonies Sam Adams—"that Matchiavel of Chaos"—sought, through the establishment of town committees of correspondence, to unite the workingmen of the port towns and the farmers of the rural districts in political action;² and the burgesses of Virginia launched their plan of a provincial committee of correspondence that

¹ *4 Mass. Hist. Soc. Colls.*, vol. iv, p. 360.

² This characterization of Adams is one of many with which Thomas Hutchinson sought to give vent to his feelings. British Museum, Additional MSS., no. 35912, f. 225 (*Library of Congress Transcripts*).

might give uncensored expression to the political grievances of the southern planters.

In May, 1773, a new tea act was passed by parliament, which stampeded the merchants into joining forces once more with the political radicals and irresponsible elements. This new law, if put into operation, would have enabled the great East India Company to monopolize the colonial tea market to the exclusion of both American smugglers and law-abiding tea traders.¹ Alarmed at this prospect and fearful lest further monopoly privileges in trade might follow from the success of the present experiment, the colonial merchant class joined in an active popular agitation for the purpose of preventing the landing of any of the tea importations of the East India Company. Though their efforts for a vigorous but restrained opposition met with substantial success elsewhere, they were overreached at Boston by the superior management of Sam Adams and the unintelligence of Governor Hutchinson; and the British trading company became the involuntary host at a tea party costing £15,000.

The Boston Tea Party marked a turning point in the course of events both in America and Britain. In both countries it was regarded by the merchants and moderates as a lawless destruction of private property and an act of wanton defiance which no self-respecting government could wisely ignore. Plainly the issue between the colonies and the mother country had ceased to be one of mere trading advantage. Outside of New England, colonial opinion, so far as it expressed itself, greeted the event with a general disapproval and apprehension. In the mother country parliament proceeded to the passage of the severe disciplinary measures of 1774.

The effect of this punitive legislation cannot be overestimated, for it convinced many colonists who had disapproved of the Boston vandalism that the greater guilt now lay on the side of

¹ See article by the present writer entitled "The Uprising against the East India Company," *POL. SCI. QUAR.*, vol. xxxii, pp. 60-79. For a detailed discussion of mercantile and proletarian influences throughout the period of revolutionary agitation, see *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York, 1918), by the present writer.

parliament. "They look upon the chastisement of Boston to be purposely rigorous, and held up by way of intimidation to all America . . ." wrote Governor Penn from Philadelphia. "Their delinquency in destroying the East India Company's tea is lost in the attention given to what is here called the too severe punishment of shutting up the port, altering the Constitution, and making an Act, as they term it, screening the officers and soldiers shedding American blood."¹ From this time on there occurred in the several provinces a contest for the control of public policy between the moderates on the one hand and the radicals or extremists on the other, the former receiving aid and comfort from the royal officials and their circle of friends. This line of cleavage is unmistakable in the case of practically every province.

The moderates as a group wanted to pay for the tea destroyed and to propose to parliament an act of union which should automatically dispose of all controversial questions for the future. The radicals were opposed to compromise and as a class desired a comprehensive and drastic boycott of Great Britain with which to exact from parliament recognition of the colonial claim to complete home rule. Both parties were willing to make a trial of strength in an intercolonial congress; and after bitter contests in each province to control the *personnel* of the irregularly elected delegations, the First Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia in September, 1774. In this notable gathering the moderates discovered to their dismay that they were outnumbered; and, in the disconsolate phrase of a Maryland merchant, "Adams, with his crew, and the haughty Sultans of the South juggled the whole conclave of the Delegates."² Indeed this extralegal body, by adopting the Association, decreed that the merchants of America should sacrifice their trade for the benefit of a cause from which they had come to be alienated; and the radicals in congress provided for spreading a network of committees over the continent to insure obedience to their decree.

¹ 4 American Archives (Force, P., comp.), vol. i, 514.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 1194.

In the popular conventions called prior to the First Continental Congress and in the provincial meetings that were held to ratify its doings, the people from the back-country counties of many provinces were, for the first time, admitted to that full measure of representation which had long been denied them by the unjust system of apportionment in the colonial assemblies. Deeply stirred by the political slogans of the tide-water radicals, they ranged themselves by their side and lent momentum to an agitation that was hastening toward independence. In closely divided provinces like Pennsylvania and South Carolina their voice was undoubtedly the decisive factor.

The proceedings of the First Continental Congress were viewed with mixed feelings by the colonists. The moderates who had lingered in the popular movement in order to control it began to withdraw, although it required the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington or even the Declaration of Independence to convince some that their efforts could be of no avail. The merchants perforce acquiesced in the regulations of the Association, which, in the early months, were not without profit to them. The radical committees of the coast towns, formerly controlled by the merchants, began to fall into the hands of the democratic mechanic class. In New York, Boston and Philadelphia alike, "nobodies" and "unimportant persons" succeeded to power; and even in Savannah, Governor Wright declared that "the Parochial Committee are a Parcel of the Lowest People, Chiefly Carpenters, Shoemakers, Blacksmiths, &c. . . ."¹ Flushed with success, the radical leaders busied themselves with consolidating their following in town and country through the creation of committees of observation and provincial committees and conventions. Little wonder was it that, in this changed aspect of public affairs, a worthy minister of Charleston, S. C., should be dismissed by his congregation "for his audacity in . . . saying that *mechanics* and country *clowns* had no right to dispute about politics, or what kings, lords and commons had done," or that the newspaper account should add: "All *such* divines should be taught to know that

¹ *Ga. Hist. Soc. Colls.*, vol. iii, p. 228.

mechanics and country clowns (infamously so called) are the real and absolute masters of king, lords, commons and priests . . ."¹

Events had reached a stage where the extremists in both countries were in control. What Chatham and Joseph Gallo-way might have adjusted to their mutual satisfaction could not be rationally discussed by North and Sam Adams. Under the circumstances it was inevitable that the policy of commercial coercion, adopted by the First Continental Congress, should soon be superseded by armed warfare as the weapon of the radicals, and that open rebellion should in turn give way to a struggle for independence. The thronging events of these later months are familiar enough in outline and need not be re-counted here. The key to these times is to be found in the fact that the radical elements were a minority of the colonial population and that only through their effective organization and aggressive tactics could they hope to whip into line the great body of timid and indifferent people who lacked either organization or a definite program.

The successive steps leading to independence were not taken without great mental travail, without suspicion of each other's motives, without sordid consultation of economic advantage, or without doubt as to the rectitude of the course or fear of the consequences. Thousands of men of recognized social and business connections, who had been active in the earlier agitation for colonial home rule, opposed separation and left their native land rather than be witnesses to its undoing. One of these earnestly warned his countrymen in April, 1776, that "a set of men whom nobody knows . . . are attempting to hurry you into a scene of anarchy; their scheme of Independence is visionary; they know not themselves what they mean by it."² On the other hand, John Adams found food for sober reflection in the rejoicing of a horse-jockey friend of his: "Oh! Mr. Adams, what great things have you and your colleagues done for us! . . . There are no courts of justice

¹ *Newport Mercury*, Sept. 26, 1774; also Pinkney's *Va. Gazette*, Oct. 13.

² *American Archives*, vol. v, pp. 1141-1142.

now in this Province and I hope there never will be another."¹ Many a man of property, like the patriot, Henry Laurens, wept when he listened to the reading of the Declaration of Independence, or else, like John Ross of Philadelphia, "loved ease and Madeira much better than liberty and strife," and decided to be neutral in the struggle.²

The real significance of the American Revolution, however, is not to be measured in terms of the conflicting emotions and purposes of those who, wittingly or unwittingly, helped to bring it about. What great issue in history has not been scarred by sordid motives, personal antagonisms and unintelligent decisions? Fundamentally the American Revolution represented the refusal of a self-reliant people to permit their natural and normal energies to be confined against their will, whether by an irresponsible imperial government or by the ruling minorities in their midst.

The popular view of the Revolution as a great forensic controversy over abstract governmental rights will not bear close scrutiny. How could a people, who for ten years were not in agreement among themselves as to their aims and aspirations, be said to possess a common political philosophy? Before assuming that Otis or Dickinson or Thomson Mason spoke the voice of the colonists, the historian must first ascertain what class or section of the population each represented and how widespread its influence was. At best, an exposition of the political theories of the anti-parliamentary party is an account of their retreat from one strategic position to another. Abandoning a view that based their liberties on charter grants, they appealed to their constitutional rights as Englishmen; and when that position became untenable, they invoked the doctrine of the rights of man. Likewise, their sincere devotion to the kingship was not open to question through ten years of controversy, when suddenly, a few months before the end, an English immigrant jerked the bandages from their eyes and revealed the goal of republicanism and independence at which they had

¹ Works, vol. ii, pp. 420-421.

² Graydon, A., *Memoirs of His Own Time* (Littell, J. S., ed.), p. 118.

already arrived in fact. Without discounting in any way the propagandist value attaching to popular shibboleths as such, it may as well be admitted that the colonists would have lost their case if the decision had turned upon an impartial consideration of the legal principles involved.

Some of the difficulties in arriving at the truth concerning the Tories may also be apparent. Prior to 1774, it would be a distortion of the facts to picture the country as divided into two major parties, one representing blind attachment to the doctrine of parliamentary supremacy and the other a narrow partisanship of the doctrine of colonial home rule. Rather, the American colonists, united in desiring a large degree of colonial autonomy, differed in opinion as to what limitations of home rule were admissible and as to what methods of opposition were best adapted to secure the relief they desired. In this period every true American was a loyalist in the sense that he favored the permanent integrity of the British empire. Indeed, to regard "Tory" and "loyalist" as equivalent terms would place the historian in the predicament of classing practically the entire colonial population as Tories until 1776.

Excepting always the royal official class and its social connections, the terms "Tory" and "patriot" became intelligible for the first time when the First Continental Congress defined the radical program in the Continental Association and stigmatized those who opposed the program as "enemies of American liberty." As the radical program advanced from commercial coercion to armed rebellion, the local committees applied a new test of patriotism, that of allegiance to the rebellion. It should be remembered, however, that the object of this armed uprising was not independence but, as often in English history, a change in ministerial policy. With the Declaration of Independence patriotism became for the first time synonymous with disloyalty to England. Many men, like Daniel Dulany and Joseph Galloway, who may rightly be considered broad-minded patriotic Americans in the earlier years of the revolutionary contest, became Tories by the new definitions; and John Dickinson is the example of a man who narrowly escaped the infamy of not making up his mind in

favor of independence as quickly as the majority of the Second Continental Congress. The disorders of the Confederation period were a justification of the decision made by the Tories; but the reconstructive forces in American society which built a nationalistic republic under the Constitution have eloquently vindicated the choice made by the revolutionists.

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